

*Daryl and Mary Jo at Lake Victoria.*

## MORE OF THE LIVING WATER AND THE BREAD OF LIFE

*By Dee Reed*

Throwing up his hands in frustration, gritting his teeth, Daryl Oft cried out to God, “OK, God, I’ll go wherever you want me to go.” Although his immediate concern was where he and wife Mary Jo should attend church, God took his prayer at face value. Within 24 hours, not only had the Ofts been

needed to be more involved in church and had a desire for that,” says Daryl.

What prompted his prayer of frustration was choosing between a large active church 100 miles away and a tiny church in their home city of Payson, Arizona that was struggling with a membership of a dozen. In addition to the nudge

guided to a church home but had been invited by Arizona Conference President Duane McKey to travel more than 8,500 miles around the world to Kenya.

A few years before this, Daryl and Mary Jo were struggling with more than where to go to church; it was more like *whether* to go to church. A series of disappointments had pushed them away, even to the point of resigning their membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“Daryl grew up Adventist, and I had been Adventist since I was a young adult,” says Mary Jo. “We started coming back to our local church with encouragement from the local pastor and his wife, Larry and Shirley Engel.”

“We were coming closer to the Lord and had decided we

from God, the Ofts decided they wanted to be more involved, and the local church gave the greatest opportunity. So the day after his prayer, the couple attended Payson Adventist Church and heard Elder McKey speak.

“We stayed and helped serve at the potluck lunch. When we were finished, there were only two seats left – right next to the McKeys,” says Daryl, and the rest is history.

McKey, prompted by conversation with the Ofts at lunch, invited the couple to go to Kenya in three weeks to preach.

“Daryl and I both thought, ‘How could I possibly do this?’ How could we get three weeks of sermons ready? All the obstacles with our businesses – passports, immunizations, tickets – so many obstacles,” says Mary Jo.

“All thoughts about taking a Sabbath afternoon nap were gone,” says Daryl.

But with God, nothing is impossible. One by one the barriers were removed.

Armed with sermons prepared by the Share Him program of the North Carolina Conference, which provides all the sermons on PowerPoint, the Ofts took off on their global adventure. To say that their lives were irrevocably changed would be an understatement.

Although the Arizona Conference helped some with the cost of their trip, most of the expenses fell on the Ofts, which in a good business year would have been doable, but this was not a good year.

“Our company, Diversified Solutions, works with occupational health. The previous fall we had

decided to expand to two offices and went out on a limb to do this. We knew it would be okay because we make 50% of our annual income in the fall with flu vaccines," says Mary Jo.

Unfortunately, that was the year there was no flu vaccine; so the couple came within a breath of going bankrupt. Fast forward to June the next year, and they were being asked by God and the conference president to fund a trip to Kenya.

"We'd made a commitment to go, so we went, and God has blessed this business—I couldn't even begin to share with you how it has grown," says Daryl. "We know it's because we stepped out in faith."

Six months later, they were invited to be

interviewed by ASI in Arizona.

"Duane [McKey] invited us to Phoenix to an ASI meeting, and since we had made a commitment to go where He wanted us to go, we went," says Daryl.

That first visit has turned into many opportunities to share at ASI meetings and with ASI members what God has done for them. They have been invited to deliver the keynote seminar at the Northwest Regional ASI meeting.

"Instead of having nine minutes to tell our story, we'll have three hours," says Daryl. "From a spiritual perspective, neither one of us has ever seen energy and enthusiasm like that displayed by the people in ASI."

One trip to Kenya turned into many others, and Living Waters International was born, with the Ofts in the lead to bring first potable water and now food to the people of the villages on Rusinga Island in Lake Victoria in Kenya.

"It was my understanding that they had not had fresh water for more than three years because the water system they had in place was no longer functional—all of the water technicians had died of AIDS,"

says Oft. "The population of Rusinga has a 42% HIV/AIDS rate and an 80% orphan rate."

Through a lot of work, donated funds and volunteer effort, Oft and a representative from Adventist Development and

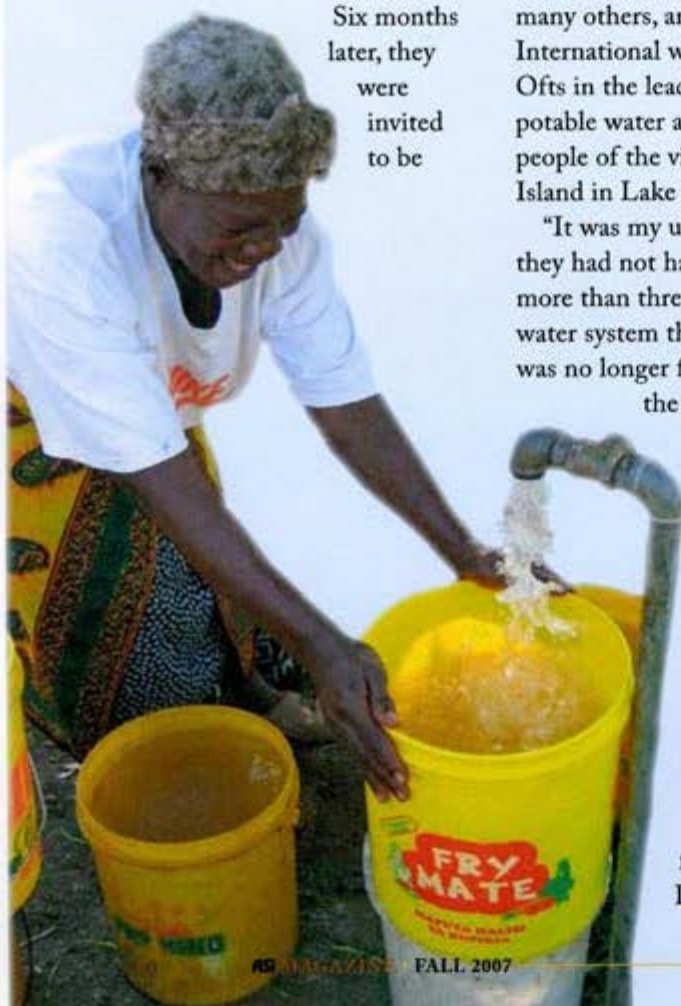
Relief Agency (ADRA) were able to get a new water system up and running. The community wanted to name the water project after the Ofts and everyone who had helped with the project, but Daryl convinced them to name it Living Waters.

That phase only provided for a few villages, and so the Ofts continued to work to bring more water to the region. In the last two years, they have refurbished the water infrastructure, including repairing the wind-operated water pumping system and trenching and laying over one-half mile of galvanized 2-inch water line to bring water directly into the village center. Four water tanks were purchased and installed while other tanks were refurbished, providing almost 13,000 gallons of stored water capacity. Water valves were replaced and a water intake system was designed, built and installed to bring water directly out of Lake Victoria.

But their work is not done yet. As this piece is written, Daryl is on his way to Kenya to begin building a feeding center for the hundreds of orphans on the island.

"We weren't planning to go back until next February, but we got a sizable donation from a donor who said, 'Take this and go back tomorrow,'" says Oft. "If we wait until February, some of those children will die. Now we're providing 48 children one meal a day, five days a week."

Once completed, the center will provide two meals a day daily to 200 children and approximately 15 widows who are unable to care for themselves.





*Mary Jo gives food to a hungry boy.*

*The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst; I, Jehovah, will answer them, I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water . . . that they may see and understand that the hand of Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it (Isaiah 41: 17-20).*

Daryl and Mary Jo want to make sure it's clear that they are only the vessels through which this work is being done. "God has provided the miracles," says Daryl.

To date, in addition to Living Waters International's bringing life-saving food and water to the island, more than 250 people have been baptized and



*The children come to Daryl for their portion of food.*

are receiving the true Living Water that will bring them eternal life. ■

*Dee Reed is a freelance writer living in St. Louis, Missouri.*



*Boys at Kaswanga, thankful for their meal.*

*For whoever will give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you are Christ's, most certainly I tell you, he will in no way lose his reward (Mark 9: 41).*

